

## Whale tissue taken to lab

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By CONOR BERRY

Aug. 1 - PROVINCETOWN - As a team of Cape-based scientists took samples Tuesday from four dead whales roughly 160 miles east of Cape Cod, sharks feasted on the decomposing carcasses.

Researchers still do not know what caused at least seven large whales and one smaller whale to die near the Hague Line, the international sea boundary in the Gulf of Maine that separates the United States from Canada.

The samples will be sent to a laboratory for analysis to determine whether biotoxins were present in the whales at the time of their deaths, said Dr. Michael Moore, a leading whale expert at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Since July 3, an estimated eight whales have been discovered dead within a 50-mile radius along the southeastern fringe of the Gulf of Maine. The most recent carcasses - of a humpback whale and a pilot whale - were discovered Tuesday by Canadian officials.

"Basically, we got what we went out for," Moore said, speaking by cell phone while driving back to the Cape yesterday from Kittery, Maine, where researchers

Moore, who credited the Coast Guard crew for being "extraordinarily helpful" throughout the mission, said researchers may head back out to the

disembarked after a full day at sea Tuesday.

The research team, which did the sampling while aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma, included scientists from WHOI, the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown and the Cape Cod Stranding Network in Buzzards Bay.

Moore said at least one of the whales sampled Tuesday showed signs of a possible entanglement. Scarring, perhaps from rope or line, was observed on the whale's tail region, he said, suggesting the animal could have gotten tangled in fishing gear.

Feces, urine and stomach content samples, among others, were taken from one pilot whale and three humpbacks.

The animals were floating belly up, Moore said, allowing scientists to access the animals' internal organs.

While team members carefully drew tissue and fluid samples and gathered data, several blue sharks, some as long as 10 feet, fed on the carcasses, Moore said.

"They were nibbling around the edges," he said.  
Gulf of Maine if more dead whales are spotted.

When asked if a preliminary cause of

death had been established, Moore said,  
"I would not speculate at this point."